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## FACT SHEET

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### **2006–2007 Ralph N. Kleps Award Recipient: Four-Court Regional Appellate Division Program, Superior Courts of Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, and Sierra Counties**

An appellate division merged from four courts provides improved efficiency in processing and hearing limited-jurisdiction cases, misdemeanor infractions, and traffic court appeals. The Superior Court of Lassen County was designated as lead court and operates the regional appeal processing center for the appellate division. The presiding judge of the division, also from Lassen, appoints a judge panel in each case, designates the panel's presiding judge, and assures that no judges are from the trial court's county. The record on appeal, briefs, motions, and notices are all made available to the panel through a secure Web site, and appellate hearings are held by videoconferencing, eliminating travel.

#### **Why This Program Is Innovative**

Recent appellate division judicial assignments by the Chief Justice of California confirm there are no other unified appellate divisions operating in the state.

#### **Problems the Program Was Designed to Address**

- There was the appearance of peer review.
- Limited judicial time was used inefficiently.
- Because of the small number of appeals filed in each participating court, traditional processing of appellate division cases involved clerk staff having to re-learn rules, timelines, and notice requirements each time an appeal was filed.
- The logistics of circulating the record on appeal and briefs and hearing oral arguments over such a large geographic area also led to inefficiencies. The process was laborious, time-consuming, and complicated.

#### **Program Goals and Desired Outcomes**

- Advance multicourt coordination and efficiencies within a reasonably distinct geographic area, while preserving each individual court's ability to be responsive to local conditions and needs.
- Increase efficiencies in the administration and management of appeals.
- Maximize utilization of court resources.
- Improve service to the public.

#### Actual Program Outcomes and Benefits

- All appeals processed are heard by panel judges from outside the court from which the appeal arose.
- The combined appellate division caseload has been sufficient to maintain the knowledge and skills of the appeals processing center staff at the lead court, promoting compliance with applicable statutes and rules of court and consistency in superior court appellate division case management.
- Appeals are processed and concluded in a shorter time through the use of document transmission via the secure Web site.

#### How This Program Was Originally Funded

A proposal was submitted to, and the judges met with, the Chief Justice to discuss a more efficient use of regional resources. Approval was given and the Superior Court of Lassen County designated as the lead court for the pilot project. An MOU between the Superior Court of Lassen County and the Judicial Council funded this pilot project out of the Judicial Administration Efficiency and Modernization Fund.

#### Ongoing Budget and Staffing Impacts

Substantial savings in judicial travel time has been realized with appellate division hearings being conducted through telecommunication. All clerk support functions for the appellate division are performed by staff from Lassen. Expenses include personal expenses for an appeals clerk, equipment, and supplies.

#### How the Program Is Sustained

Appeals processing center staff have maintained statistical reporting of all case dispositions and status of active appeals processed through the unified appellate division. The four judges assigned conduct an annual review and report to the Chief Justice of California.

#### Recommendations for Courts Wanting to Replicate This Program

The innovative approach to regionalize appellate functions, utilizing technology and maximizing limited court resources with a lead court approach, has made the unified appellate division a successful project, easily replicated by other courts struggling to provide services to populations spread over large distances. The comprehensive appeal processing and procedures manual is available on CD to any interested court.

#### Contact:

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#### Additional resources:

Ralph N. Kleps Award information, [www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/innovations](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/innovations)  
Superior Court of Lassen County's Web site: [www.lassencourt.ca.gov](http://www.lassencourt.ca.gov)